The Boundaries of Spatial Separation: The Concept of Hospitality in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas

Edna Langenthal

Ariel University, Israel.

Abstract

This paper seeks to enrich our ethical understanding of the built environment, planning, and urban policy by drawing on the philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas, particularly his concept of hospitality. Lévinas maintains that hospitality has an ethical meaning since it entails welcoming the other into one's home while simultaneously respecting their strangeness. However, being hospitable puts the host in a vulnerable state vis-a-vis their guest. This ethical insight leads us to question the significance of the façade of a building as a flat exterior that frames or represents the contents of a building. Although Lévinas does not explicitly make this connection, I argue that the facade preserves the tension between the tendency of the house to draw its inhabitants inwards, and the event of welcoming a guest, who is introduced from the outside. This double movement suggests that the facade is a boundary. Boundaries are places of tension and conflict; however, these very qualities present the opportunity for the facade to be a space of hospitality.

Keywords: Lévinas, urbanity, ethics, facades, architecture.
https://doi.org/ 10.26262/exna.v0i3.7030

Preface

Today, most of us live in cities. These built environments are composed of building facades, which, when viewed together, express the various conflicts – political, ethnic or economic – that characterize the city. Often, the city is understood as a space that merely contains these conflicts. However, as I argue in this paper, the relationship is deeper than this since the city, at its very core, is a conflictual structure. I would like to propose a perspective on the built environment that draws on ethical considerations in an attempt to enrich how we think about planning and urban policy. The starting point is the concept of hospitality proposed by the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas. For Lévinas, hospitality has an ethical dimension as it is an event that takes place between "I" and "other," and it is characterized by the tension inherent to this relationship. To show hospitality is to welcome the other into one's home while respecting their strangeness. This act puts the person who performs it in a vulnerable position. The concept of hospitality evolved in parallel with the development of Western culture. However, the underlying idea is present as a central theme in almost every religion and culture, and it therefore has various time and place dependent meanings. Its centrality is emphasized because it defines the most basic element in social and spatial relations.

The traditional discourse on hospitality is rooted in two religious and theological notions, namely, that the stranger is divine and merits absolute respect from their host, and that the host is prohibited from having economic relations with the stranger. However, these notions are no

Ex-centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Media; Issue 3, 2019; eISSN: 2585-3538.

longer influential. Hospitality has become commodified in such institutions as the "hospitality industry" which treats hospitality as an economic act. Furthermore, modern social and political discourse no longer treats the stranger with absolute respect; rather, they construe the stranger as a hostile and threatening invader that arouses fear, anxiety and hatred. It may be that there is something archaic about hospitality, which is inseparable from religion – a nostalgic yearning for a lost sense of social harmony. Despite this anachronism, it appears that hospitality has become a central and important idea in relation to various ethical questions.

The connection between location and ethics is integral to Lévinas' concept of dwelling, which involves an ethical relationship between a person and the other. Yet, the origin of this connection is not immediately apparent. Martin Heidegger, who greatly influenced Lévinas' thinking, explicitly outlined this connection. In his "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger traced the word "ethics" back to its root "ethos," which means place or habitat. For Heidegger ethics is the way in which a person dwells in the world in relation to the divine. However, whereas Heidegger focused on dwelling as en ethical relationship with the divine, Lévinas posits dwelling as a relationship between a subject and the other. Heidegger maintains that "ethical" speech must not use terminology steeped in the traditional meaning of ethics:

> If the name "ethics," in keeping with the basic meaning of the word ethos, should now say that "ethics" ponders the abode of man, then that thinking which thinks the truth of Being as the primordial element of man, as one who ek-sists, is in itself the original ethics. (*Letter* 234-35)

He contends that previous ways of positing ethics have failed, albeit in different ways, in their attempts to expose and explicitly explore the issue of Being. They were unsuccessful in considering man's essential ethos because they did not consider the relationship between Being and dwelling as crucial to existence. The theme of traditional Western ethics therefore, developed as the logic of customs rather than as the logos of the ethos.[1] Heidegger separates the notions of morality and ethics. For him, the ethical principle relates to behavior and free conduct, to the historical becoming of human beings. His criticism rejects the moral principle, which caused a degeneration of ethos, the original foundation of ethics.[2]

Ethos is the Greek root of the term ethics, and it originally means a place or area to which animals return. Ethos is not necessarily a place of residence – a specific house, plot, county, or

---

[1] For further reading on this subject see Bernard Boele, "The Question of Ethics in the Thought of Martin Heidegger" (Frings 99-103).

[2] The source of this degeneration lies in Plato's philosophy, since his thinking has deconstructed the original thinking of Being into separate lines of science in which the whole being has been forgotten in favor of particular knowledge. Thus, logic and ethics were "born" as separate disciplines. Such thinking forgets that it is thinking about Being. According to Heidegger, it is not necessary to write laws and books on ethics in order to preserve the original ethos, which is better preserved if not talked about, as the short story about Heraclitus proves (Heidegger, *Letter* 195-96, 233-34).

nation – but rather a dwelling, a place where a person feels "at home." Heidegger turns to a quote from Heraclitus in order to explain the original meaning of ethos:

> A saying of Heraclitus which consists of only three words says something so simply that from it the essence of the ethos immediately comes to light. The saying of Heraclitus (Fragment 119) goes: *ethos anthropoi daimon*. This is usually translated, "A man's character is his daimon." This translation thinks in a modern way, not a Greek one. Ethos means abode, dwelling place. The open region of his abode allows what pertains to man's essence, and what in thus arriving resides in nearness to him, to appear… The fragment says: Man dwells, insofar as he is man, in the nearness of god. (Heidegger, *An Introduction* 256; emphasis in original)

Heidegger notes the mistranslation of Heraclitus in order to emphasize that ethos refers to the nature – the character or traits – of something. He goes on to explain that in ancient Greece ethos meant dwelling or abode, an open area where man resides. Thus, Heraclitus' saying should have been translated: "Man dwells, insofar as he is man, in the nearness of god." We learn from Heraclitus, via Heidegger, that dwelling involves that which is essential to man: his proximity to God.

Heidegger then turns to a story that appears in Aristotle,[3] which recounts the tale of strangers who visit Heraclitus. Upon their arrival, they catch Heraclitus enjoying the warmth of a stove. The visitors, embarrassed by the encounter, stop in the entranceway and stare at him. Heraclitus notices them and invites them in, saying, "Here too the gods are present." At first glance, the visitors are surprised by what they see. It is strange to see the philosopher engaged in the mundane, and this impression conflicts with the expectation that a philosopher should be engaged in an exalted pursuit. The divergence between expectation and reality produces the urge to stall and perhaps leave. Heraclitus, who sees the disappointment on their faces, encourages them to enter by saying that here, in this situation, the gods reside as well. Heraclitus' response to the embarrassment of his visitors demonstrates that even the gods can be hosted in mundane circumstances. Although the dwelling is a familiar place, it is open to the presence of God, to that which is unknown. It should be clear by now that the difference between Heidegger and Lévinas with regard to dwelling does not concern the lack of an ethical dimension in the philosophy of the former – since as we have seen this is present in the story of Heraclitus. However, the ethical in Heidegger does not refer to the subject's relation to the other, but to the way the subject relates to Being and the world.

The concept of hospitality raises important ethical questions with regards to space and place, and at present there is renewed interest in the concept. Current debates regarding hospitality are not simply rooted in a nostalgic sense of longing for social harmony. Rather, they respond to the

[3] See Heidegger (*Being* 256) and Aristotle (*On the Parts* I, 5, 645a 17ft).

tension that arises when a sense of personal or shared group identity must confront an unnamed sense of otherness. In recent years, a growing body of research responding to this tension has emerged, which includes, for example, papers focusing on the way in which urban policy should address the steady immigration of migrant workers and their families to more economically developed countries, a phenomenon that has changed the face of Europe.[4]

The ethics of hospitality represents the challenge of "impossible" relationships without a constitutive principle. It demands that hosts let strangers into their homes while simultaneously respecting their foreignness. The discussion of hospitality is important to this paper because hospitality is the act through which the home reinforces itself by turning outward. However, the encounter with that which cannot be named suggests that hospitality is already based on the primacy of significant internal relationships beyond identity. It both allows the building of an identity and challenges it.

The paper is divided into two main parts: The first part of the paper draws on the thought of Lévinas to demonstrate how the notions of hospitality and the home structure human ambivalence. The home separates humans from the anonymity of the natural world. It is the condition for the establishment of the subject: "The privileged role of the home does not consist in being the end of human activity but in being its condition, and in this sense its commencement" (Lévinas, *Totality* 152). Lévinas reveals the character of the subject by examining their attitude to the world, to the home. For Lévinas, expressions of home, homeliness, and hospitality contribute to the significance of being in the world. The home makes entry and exit possible and thus allows the subject to welcome others. The second part explores the implications that this line of thinking has on the field of architecture, particularly the way in which it challenges the concept of the facade as a flat frame. I propose that the building facade should be understood as a boundary that, at its core, is marked by an essential conflict; yet, this tension enables it to become a space of hospitality.

Part 1

According to Lévinas, acts of hospitality are ethical because they demonstrate an openness towards complete alterity, transcendence from the boundaries of subjectivity, and movement towards infinity, towards God. Hospitality as an event occurs between self and other and therefore contains an inherent tension. On the one hand, hospitality means greeting the other into

[4] In his book *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, Jacques Derrida emphasizes the contradictory nature of the duty of hospitality – a duty that dictates the welcoming of foreigners with the objective of integrating them, while at the same time respecting their foreignness (76-78). He writes: "That same duty dictates respecting differences, idioms, minorities, singularities, but also the universality of formal law, the desire for translation, agreement and univocity [. . .] " (77). He suggests that these two perceptions of duty compete with each other and currently divide European national consciousness, thus reflecting the characteristic of mutual contradiction of any act of hospitality. The ethics of hospitality therefore conflict with the "laws of hospitality." Whereas the former emphasizes respect for the fundamental foreignness of the other, the latter emphasizes the conventions of Western civilization, its personal, political or community identity and the formal laws that regulate the civil, commercial and interpersonal relations therein.

one's home, accepting and welcoming the otherness of the other. On the other hand, by welcoming the other, hosts jeopardize the safety of their homes and property. This tension stands at the basis of Lévinas' innovative understanding of subjectivity. As he sums it up, almost aphoristically, in the preface to *Totality and Infinity*, "This book will present subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as hospitality" (*Totality* 27).

In contrast to the metaphysical tradition, according to which subjectivity always involves the reduction and dissolution of otherness, Lévinas understands subjectivity in terms of hospitality. At the same time, he insists that a pre-condition for hospitality is the constitution of an independent host with a defined sense of identity, an "I" that dwells in the world and who is at home with oneself [*chez soi*] (*Totality* 37).[5] The home, according to Lévinas, does not merely contain the subject; rather, it is the very site of the constitution of the *I can* (*Totality* 143-44). The home allows one to distance oneself from the elements: "Through the home our relation with space as distance and extension is substituted for the simple bathing in the element" (*Totality* 132). This distance creates the separation that is necessary to perceive something as an object. By forming this separation, the home allows the subject to bestow meaning on things.

The home is the place where nature can be approached as an object. Although people cannot abandon the elements and completely depart from nature, they can build homes for themselves that do not allow the elements immediate access. The four walls of the home hinder the elements of the outside world from affecting the inhabitant of a home. Thus, the home allows the subject to maintain a separate identity from the world at large. Lévinas places the emphasis on one being at home with oneself, and not on one being at home in the world. Lévinas attributes the home to the world, but the subject is not at home *in* the world but rather at home *with himself* in the world.[6] The subject lives by themselves at home and only then turns to the world. In other words, a person is separated from the world while being in and dependent on the world. People do not go out into the world as foreign, homeless beings, but rather as dwelling beings.

It should be emphasized, however, that being in the home is an ambiguous state because, to a certain extent, it is a state of being that is simultaneously inside and outside. On the one hand it creates a separation between the subject and the outside world. The home creates a border that, once crossed, offers the subject a space for recollection. On the other hand, although the home separates the subject from the world, it also allows the subject to accept the foreigner, who comes from the world outside the home. The ambiguity of the home is derived from its ability to simultaneously offer a space for recollection while at the same time facilitating the possibility for the subject to accept alterity (Lévinas, *Totality* 148).

The home belongs to the subject's interiority but does not belong to her internal closeness. In other words, the home is like the interiority's foyer: "Circulating between visibility and

---

[5] The English translation of *chez soi*, which is Lévinas' expression for the concrete form in which an existent comes to exist, is "at home with oneself." The justification for this is Lévinas' interest in the concept of the home.

[6] This differs from Heidegger who called the act of existence "Being in the world" [In-der-Welt-sein] and for whom the existential characteristic of human being is being in the world.

invisibility, one is always bound for the interior of which one's home, one's corner, one's tent, or one's cave is the vestibule" (Lévinas, *Totality* 156). It serves as a liminal space where the subject's interiority can come into contact with the other by allowing the stranger access. For Lévinas, the role of the home is twofold; on the one hand it is the place that provides the condition for developing a sense of interiority, and, on the other hand, it sets the condition for creating a sense of openness towards alterity. In order to demonstrate how Lévinas views such a home, I will first offer a short description of the process by which the subject comes into being from the element.

1.1 The Element

Nature or, as Lévinas calls it, the element, is anonymous; it is the hylic medium from which things emerge and to which they return (*Existence and Existents* 8). It does not belong to a particular person, and like water, earth, light and even the city, it is in principle, inalienable. We are in sensuous contact with the element; it envelops us: "[T]he adequate relation with the element is precisely bathing" (Lévinas, *Totality* 132). Lévinas likens contact with the element to being immersed in liquid, an experience that provokes sensations that we cannot attribute to any particular cause. As the subject cannot distance themselves from the element, the element lacks an outline or any other quality that would allow it to be grasped. It should also be noted that distance is necessary in order to grasp anything.

The act of building allows the subject to overcome their absolute proximity to the element. The home is a semi-internal space that surrounds the subject and separates them from the element. The world lacks objective reality prior to building the home. The home dissolves the element, which facilitates the relationship between humans and the world. Lévinas says that the home creates intimacy against the anonymity of the element: "To dwell is not the simple fact of the anonymous reality of being cast into existence as a stone one casts behind oneself; it is a recollection, a coming to oneself, a retreat home with oneself as in a land of refuge, which answers to a hospitality, an expectancy, a human welcome" (*Totality* 156). By understanding nature as anonymous, Lévinas separates himself from thinkers who envision the home as a bridge to nature or an expression of the original human state. If nature is anonymous, as Lévinas claims, then the intimacy of the home is the opposite.

1.2 Enjoyment: The Formation of the Subject

According to Lévinas, the subject is first and foremost a body and, as such, it is in direct contact with the world. Subjects become who they are through enjoyment. The notion of enjoyment expresses the primary relation that humans have toward their existence and discloses the fact that human lives are valuable: "We live from 'good soup,' air, light, spectacles, work, ideas, sleep, etc… These are not objects of representations. We live from them" (*Totality* 110). Lévinas describes inwardness as a dimension of a living subjectivity that is intimately linked to

an outside that nourishes it.[7] Nourishment is the concrete foundation to which life is already bound; Lévinas calls it "objects of enjoyment" (*Totality* 111). This does not mean hedonistic pleasure, but rather the fundamental structure of life. Sorrow and pain sustain us as well; they too nourish us and fill our lives with value.

1.3 Caring about Tomorrow

The external things that nourish us become the basic components of our lives and identities; they shape us as independent entities. However, their presence is constrained by constant insecurities. At the heart of the enjoying self stands a restless self. The self worries about tomorrow and this worry weakens one's sense of security. We constantly worry that our sense of enjoyment will cease. Hence, humans position themselves in the world in an anxious, troubled and restless manner, constantly on guard, facing an unknown future (Lévinas, *Totality* 149-50).

The act of building a home allows the inhabitant to hold onto their nourishment. The home prevents restlessness and anxiety from causing the self to collapse back into the element. Hence, the home's primary role is to break the element by creating a utopia. In Lévinas, a utopia is a non-topos: a non-place at the heart of place. It is the separation of the self from the world. This separation is formed through the subject's enjoyment, by the fact that the subject is independent and sentient. According to Lévinas, one does not approach the world directly from the world, but from a place outside the world, from the utopia of the home (*Totality* 157). The utopia is created when the inwardness of the subject, the mental space, is projected outward, so to speak. Lévinas is not an idealist who thinks being at home is simply a metaphor for the psyche. The home is a spatial entity; it is the concrete expression of human inwardness. The material home is therefore a portico to human inwardness, a gateway to subjectivity.

In addition to separating humans from the element or from nature, the home also allows representation, ownership and even ethics to ensue. This is because the home creates distance, which is fundamental for all three actions to transpire. Since the element is inseparable from humans, only building a home can create distance between them.

As independent, psychic creatures, humans develop relationships with their environment, relationships marked by ownership, labor and representation. One cannot distance oneself from one's body as one does from the home; hence, one does not relate to one's body in terms of ownership and labor. The body consumes whatever comes its way; it digests the element completely. The space of the home, on the other hand, allows one to leave things suspended. The home takes things in but does not absorb them: "The element is fixed between the four walls of the home, is calmed in possession. It appears there as a thing" (Lévinas, *Totality* 158).

---

[7] Nourishment is a metaphor; we are nourished by more than just food. On the home as a link between human and the world see (Kelly 151-68).

1.4 The Feminine

The home is the location of intimacy. The intimacy of the home contrasts with both the anonymity of the element – of nature – and the anonymity of modernity, which favors the ideals of technology and rationality over the traditional values of family and home. Lévinas expresses apprehension towards both causes of anonymity – the natural and the technological – since both impoverish human experience. Unlike Heidegger, Lévinas does not offer a mythical connection to the earth as a means of counteracting anonymity.[8] Rather, he suggests establishing intimacy through human connection, which in turn fortifies the home.

The home can seem to be an element that contains or separates the subject from the world. However, the movement into the home does not signify parting from the world but suspending the world in a way that allows one to return to it. The movement inward, into the home is egoistic in nature. According to Lévinas, this movement makes hospitality – the act of being receptive to an outside world – possible. He calls the act of retreating from the outside and entering into the home a feminine movement: "To dwell is not the simple fact of the anonymous reality…it is a recollection… a retreat home with oneself as in a land of refuge, which answers to a hospitality, an expectancy, a human welcome" (*Totality* 156). Dwelling facilitates the subject's capacity for self-reflection.[9] Furthermore, it provides a place from which the subject can open themselves to the environment, a possibility that is not self-evident. The intimacy of dwelling does not merely belong to the closed circuit of selfhood; one is not merely intimate with one's self. The intimacy of the home is a testimony to the intimacy one has with others, with the feminine element (Lévinas, *Totality* 155). The domestic element that characterizes subjectivity is linked to prior human presence. Lévinas' references to this dimension are vague. He does not explain the human presence as fundamental to the formation of the subject in detail.[10]

The feminine dimension makes the building into a home. The home welcomes all those who enter, its door is open and welcoming. Concerning this hospitality, Lévinas writes: "This refers us to its essential interiority, and to the inhabitant that inhabits it before every inhabitant, the welcoming one par excellence, welcome in itself—the feminine being" (*Totality* 157). The event of the feminine precedes the revelation of the other, precedes the transcendental relationship with others. Moreover, it is the condition for the relationship with the other: "This presence [of the feminine] includes all the possibilities of the transcendent relationship with the other" (Lévinas, *Totality* 155). In the context of this paper, the feminine dimension is the condition for the possibility of ethical relations. The feminine dimension of the home enables relations with the

---

[8] In this respect it is possible to see that Lévinas objects to Heidegger's conception of place and home.

[9] In Lévinas' vernacular *recueillement* may be interpreted as contemplation, as an observing into the soul.

[10] As part of this essay I will not address topics and critiques relating to femininity in Lévinas' philosophy. For an expansion on this subject see: Luce Irigaray, "The Fecundity of the Caress: A Reading of Lévinas, Totality and Infinity, Phenomenology of Eros" (Chanter 119-45); Stella Sandford, "Lévinas, Feminism and Feminine" (Critchley, *Cambridge* 139-60); Catherine Chalier, "Ethics and the Feminine" (Critchley, *Re-Reading* 119-29); Tina Chanter, "Feminism and the Other" (Bernasconi 32-56).

other. Windows and doors allow entry and exit through the boundaries of the home, thus facilitating hospitality – the welcoming of the other.

1.5 The Revelation of the Other's Face

Hospitality opens the home, and thus the subject, to absolute otherness, to a realm that, according to Lévinas, is outside the subject's totality. The encounter with the other constitutes a transcendental relationship. The other comes from the outside and enters the home. This event reveals that the home can never be completely private.

Like Heidegger, Lévinas expressed dismay for the tendency in modernity to devalue the ideal of the home. However, while Heidegger interprets the absence of the home as an ontological symptom of abandoning Being, Lévinas views this absence as a reminder of man's failure to comply with his moral commitment towards the other. For Lévinas, the absence of the home is an ethical problem. Individuals did not lose their homes because they failed to listen to the call of Being. Rather, they were torn from their homes because of the deprivation, political revolutions, and war that modernity brought with it.[11]

In the context of the chaos of modernity, it seems obvious to think of the home as of refuge that enables the subject to retreat within themselves. However, it can also allow the subject to become open to the other. The other can pass through the door of the home, welcomed by the façade, which should be understood as an ambiguous place, simultaneously inside and outside. The subject confronts the other. This encounter creates distance between the self and objects; those objects that became one's own because of their location in the home. In order to retreat from one's involvement with things, one needs to not only refrain from enjoying material objects, but also give them up as possessions. This requires an encounter with otherness, with a transcendent and absolute other. The other challenges claims of ownership and loosens the subject's hold on material goods and possessions by putting forth the imperative "thou shalt not kill" (Lévinas, *Totality* 199). The face of the other commands that I care for her, warns me not to harm her – she not only prohibits murder, but also greed and stinginess.

Unlike worldly objects, which are, in principle, always within our reach, the face of the other has a hidden dimension that forever escapes us, says Lévinas. The only way to come in contact with this dimension is by developing an ethical relation to the other. Humans always understand their place in the world vis-à-vis their relation to others. Hence, according to Lévinas, it is not the land or walls that make a home, but the fact that it has doors and windows, through which guests may enter.

Part 2

In the context of a paper that connects architecture and philosophy, it should be noted that it often seems that Lévinas uses the concepts dwelling and home metaphorically. However, this

---

[11] Derrida writes that Lévinas did not deal in these subjects, rather, solely in his philosophy, and he never looked away from the violence and hardship experienced by the refugee, the foreigner and the exile. (Derrida, *Adieu* 64).

does not mean that these ideas are independent of, or outside, the world. The home is a concrete entity in the world and, as such, it should be analyzed phenomenologically.[12] Dwelling and home should not be reduced to a series of characteristics that can be applied to various objects.

Lévinas criticizes the tendency to treat the human face as if it were the facade of a building: "The notion of facade [is] borrowed from building… By the facade the thing which keeps its secret is exposed enclosed in its monumental essence and in its myth, in which it gleams like a splendor but does not deliver itself" (*Totality* 193). I am standing at a piazza facing the facade of a broad, short building. There are many windows and doors on this facade, and yet it is blind. Who does it address? Whose gaze does it capture? Facade is an architectural term – the front part of a building. A building's facade, which is midway between the outside and the inside, can be interpreted in numerous ways. If the facade is seen as the inside of the building, it expresses the building's inner contents, contents that it simultaneously conceals (see fig. 1). For Lévinas, this signifies that the facade is a "flat" screen onto which the building's interiority is projected. This implies that it is conceived as a frame that represents the interior of the building, an interior designed to meet certain needs.

Fig.1. "Office Building in St Louis." *Pexels*, www.pexels.com/. Accessed 6 Dec. 2019. Copyright free image.

[12] As Lévinas attests to his method:
The method practiced here does indeed consist in seeking the condition of empirical situations, but it leads to the developments called empirical, in which the conditioning possibility is accomplished. It thus leads to concretization, an ontological role that specifies the meaning of the fundamental possibility, a meaning invisible in that condition. (Lévinas, *Totality* 173)

An office building, for example, has a facade that expresses its interiority, the fact that it is a place of work. The people who use it have a standardized and unchanging relation to it, which was planned in advance. However, this is not the only way to "read" facades. A facade can also be interpreted as a space that preserves the tension between the inward movement of entering into the home and receptivity to the external, which is implicated in welcoming the other.

The architectural object is not a static entity and movement is integral to the way we perceive it, and the facade should not be understood as a static screen. Facades have features that open and close and allow entry and exit such as doors and windows (see fig. 2). Lévinas describes the home as a fundamental existential condition, which preserves inward and outward movement. This movement is "at the same time open and closed" (*Totality* 148). It allows the self to separate from the world while also maintaining a transcendent relationship with otherness through hospitality (*Totality* 148-49).

Fig. 2. "Doors and windows; street in Archness." *Pexels*, www.pexels.com/-. Accessed 6 Dec. 2019. Copyright free image.

Doors and windows are common architectural elements that we encounter in daily life. These architectural thresholds frame our lives: we enter and exit buildings through doors; we feel secure at home because of our ability to close the door to the outside world; we maintain a relationship with the outside through the window, which we can open and close allowing air, light, and sounds to enter the home. We move in and out of homes. In fact, the "inward/outward" movement is made possible only through these openings. Doors and windows define the inside

and outside of our existential space. They separate us from and connect us to the outside (see fig. 3). Without doors or windows, the home does not exist. Closed doors disclose the fact that they can, in principle, be opened. Hence, the door is ambiguous: it defines the inside and separates a space from the outside, distinguishing the private and the public sphere, and, yet, it also allows movement from the enclosed interior to the outside world. Thus, the door is without a doubt more than a limit between interior and exterior spaces.

Fig. 3. "A window in Tel-Aviv." Photography by Joel Pearl. Permission granted.

Let us consider the facade's window. Like the door, the window both defines an inside and opens to an outside. Like doors, windows are openings in walls. However, the two differ significantly, the body carries out the inside/outside movement through the door, whereas the eyes allow us to look outside through the window: "The ambiguity of distance, both removal and connection, is lifted by the window that makes possible a look that dominates, a look of him who escapes looks, the look that contemplates" (Lévinas, *Totality* 156). A window can be open or shut. When shut, those inside look outside through the window's frame. The window then seems to define how the outside appears. This explains why we often reduce the singularity of the other to a set of properties that appear through a certain frame. While the act of opening a window changes something in the building – the basic dichotomy between inside and outside is traversed,

with outside entering inside – the change is significant mostly for those who are inside the home (see fig. 4).

Fig. 4. "Gazing through the window." *Pexels*, www.pexels.com/-. Accessed 6 Dec. 2019. Copyright free image.

It seems, then, that after entering the home, the subject establishes their connection to the outside world by gazing through the window. In fact, one can also do the opposite. After entering the home the subject can shut the windows and withdraw into the interior space, which is now completely uninterrupted by the outside. However, this withdrawal can be interrupted by the entryway, by the possibility of the door (see fig. 5).

Fig. 5. "A threshold." Photography by Edna Langenthal. Permission granted.

The door is first and foremost a threshold, and it therefore erects a place through which one can withdraw. At the same time, the door points to a fundamental crack in this closed space. Whoever is outside can knock on my door. In Lévinas' words, "This presence consists in coming toward us, in *making an entry*. It can be put in this way: the *phenomenon* of the Other's (*Autrui*) aspiration is also a *face*, or … the epiphany of a face is a *visitation*" (*Basic Philosophical* 53). The appearance of the other and the entry of the *face* are part of a movement. They are not simply given parts of the visual field. They do not appear to us like signs hung on buildings in the city, nor are they hidden from us like objects in the building that we cannot see when we are outside. In prearranged social, cultural, and political contexts, we generally recognize the face of the other when it appears before us. Lévinas argues that the visitation of the other is a kind of movement; as the face comes closer and we recognize it, we experience the act of recognition as an epiphany. The etymological root of the word face – *panim* (פנים) in Hebrew is *panah* (פנה), which is related to the verb that means turning toward – *peniyya*. In Hebrew, the face is associated with movement; it represents the action of turning toward or facing someone.

A visit often begins with someone knocking on the door, appearing on the threshold. This is the site where the simultaneous movement of withdrawing inside and welcoming the other takes place. It is a transitional space that disrupts all continuity. An architecture based on this conception of otherness needs to reconcile the tension between one's rights and the rights of the other. Architectural culture ought to conceptualize dwelling spaces where the tensions and

oppositions between outer and inner, public and private, the open and the closed are expressed and manifested together.

2.1 The Urban Setting as a Place of Despair and Hope

For Lévinas, the city simultaneously stimulates despair and hope, which blur its inhabitants' attitudes towards otherness. This idea is connected to his critique of Western philosophy, which, he claims, does not allow for the presence of radical alterity because it posits a unified structure of subjectivity that excludes genuine otherness. For Lévinas, dwelling is an interior dimension defined from the outside. The subject or "I" lives in the world as someone who has a home, as an independent creature who nevertheless exists within this world. Human beings reside in this world "as if" they belong to the private domain, to their home. Being at home is significant because it affords each person an independent identity. For Lévinas, the relationship between the home and the world is not harmoniously unified; rather, the home preserves a separate, individual identity. These separations enable economic life. Labor allows the subject to relate to the outside world and cooperate with the other. This relation typically takes the form or bartering and exchanging money, which are mediums of mutuality and symmetry. According to Lévinas, mutual and symmetrical exchange is unethical because ethics are characterized by asymmetric generosity. Hospitality is a prime example of this structure.

Lévinas focuses his critique of the external lifestyle on the institution of the "coffeehouse," which is an inseparable part of modern, urban life. He writes, "The café is a place of casual social intercourse, without mutual responsibility. One goes in not needing to. One sits down without being tired. One drinks without being thirsty" (*Nine Talmudic* 111-12). The coffeehouse is problematic because it welcomes guests in exchange for money, transforming hospitality into a consumable product and, in the process, confusing economics and ethics.

In the modern urban space, others are often ignored since they lack the capital required to consume products or receive qualifications. They arouse fear and thus warp our illusion of the safe interior. However, Lévinas still believes in an ethical urban space. Urban areas are geographically confined spaces that bring together people from heterogeneous cultures. If the city is to function, these diverse individuals must interact with each other in an ethical way.

Cities, as he writes in "Judaism and Revolution," "emerged from a void; they are without a past, with populations so mixed and individuals so dispersed that all traditions were lost" (*Nine Talmudic* 129). Lévinas is known for the ethical turn that he brought to philosophy, and his ethics are based on a unique understanding of the other, on the recognition of radical otherness towards which traditional thought remains closed. Moreover, he opposed certain aspects of urbanism in which we forget, ignore, and turn our back on the demand of the otherness constantly present in our lives, the otherness of the other person. According to Lévinas, a home where the presence of the other is not attended to is not truly a home.

In this paper I attempted to challenge the idea that building facades, which make up the urban space, are an external visage – flat partitions separating the private interior from the public exterior in a binary fashion. In the final section of the paper I demonstrated that the threshold is

the boundary, a place of conflict where the ethical event of hospitality occurs. This is derived from Lévinas' theory, which exposes the complexity of the concept of home and the threshold as a place sustaining the conflict between the self and the other. This is the event that preserves the tension between the subject and the outside world. When inside the home, the inhabitant is on the one hand shut off from the events of the outside, but on the other hand they can welcome the other. Therefore, urban spaces can be planned hospitably if we understand that the underlying basis of the city is conflictual in structure, that it is in essence a "threshold" or a doorway. In other words, planners must recognize that these conflicts are inherent parts of the city that must be considered in the planning process. As such, planning for these conflicts undermines the hegemonic perception of the urban space and makes room for the internal tensions through which the city reveals itself as pluralistic. In conclusion, unless planners reassess hospitality as inherent to the urban, cities are destined to become unethical places.

Works Cited

Aristotle. *On the Parts of Animals*, translated by James G. Lennox. Clarendon Press, 2001.

Bernasconi, Robert. *The Provocation of Lévinas: Rethinking the Other*. Routledge, 2014.

Boele, Bernard. "The Question of Ethics in the Thought of Martin Heidegger." *Heidegger and the Quest for Truth*, edited by Manfred S. Frings. Quadrangle Books, 1968.

Chanter, Tina. *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Lévinas*. Pennsylvania State UP, 2001.

Critchley, Simon, and Robert Bernasconi. *The Cambridge Companion to Lévinas*. Cambridge UP, 2002.

---. *Re-Reading Lévinas*. Indiana UP, 1991.

Derrida, Jacques. *Adieu to Emmanuel Lévinas*. Stanford UP, 1999.

---. *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*. Indiana UP, 2010.

Frings, Manfred S. *Heidegger and the Quest for Truth*. Quadrangle Books, 1968.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Harper & Row, 1962.

---. *Basic Writings*, edited by D. Farrell Krell. TJ Press, 1996.

---. *Introduction to Metaphysics*, translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. Yale UP, 2000.

Kelly, Derek A. "Home as a Philosophical Problem." *The Modern Schoolman*, 52, 1975, pp.151-168.

Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Basic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, Indiana UP, 2008.

---. *Existence and Existents*, translated by A. Lingis. Duquesne UP, 2003.

---. *Nine Talmudic Readings*, translated by Annette Aronowicz. Indiana UP, 1990; Midland Book Editions, 1994.

---. *Totality and Infinity*, translated by A. Lingis. Martinus Nijhoff, 1979.